

# ITERATIVE POWER: HERBERT GLADSTONE AND THE BRITISH IMPERIAL PROJECT IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY SOUTH AFRICA

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## Abstract

This article uses archival documents concerning Herbert Gladstone, first Governor-General of the Union of South Africa from 1910 to 1914, to explore the enactment of iterative power. Iterative power focuses on the inevitable fallibility of individual decision-makers who respond to, and seek to alter, the spatial arrangement of diverse materials and flows. Focusing on Gladstone's interaction with a critical incident in 1914, the article reveals how he imagined altering the country's unique geography but yet how the iterative power he expressed was ultimately incapable of negotiating the dynamics of capitalist accumulation, race, and the imperial project in South Africa.

**Keywords:** South Africa; Union of South Africa; Herbert Gladstone; Historiography; Iterative power

## Resumen

Este artículo utiliza documentos de archivo relativos a Herbert Gladstone, primer Gobernador General de la Unión Sudafricana de 1910 a 1914, para explorar la promulgación del poder iterativo. El poder iterativo se centra en la inevitable falibilidad de los tomadores de decisiones individuales que responden a, y tratan de alterar, la disposición espacial de diversos materiales y flujos. Centrándose en la interacción de Gladstone con un incidente crítico en 1914, el artículo revela cómo él imaginó la alteración de la geografía única del país, pero sin embargo cómo el poder iterativo que

expresó fue finalmente incapaz de negociar la dinámica de la acumulación capitalista, la raza y el proyecto imperial en Sudáfrica.

**Palabras clave:** Sudáfrica; Unión Sudafricana ; Herbert Gladstone ; Historiografía; Poder iterativo

# ITERATIVE POWER: HERBERT GLADSTONE AND THE BRITISH IMPERIAL PROJECT IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY SOUTH AFRICA

## Introduction

In a recent discussion of the interaction between politics, economics, and markets, Judith Butler has called attention to the centrality of an ‘iterable structure’ constituted by multiple and ongoing processes and actions that enact and re-enact social life.<sup>1</sup> Butler’s focus, in part, is on how the “ostensible autonomy of the economy”<sup>2</sup> is produced via an iterative and performative back-and-forth that distinguishes what is, and what is not, economic. But there is something to be said for emphasizing the more general centrality of iterable structures and processes in the making of society. ‘Iterative power,’ we might argue, is about those moments when decision-makers in diverse settings engage in a performative back-and-forth; when they respond to social tensions, dynamics, and contradictions; when they experiment by re-arranging relations, materials, and agencies to (try to) produce specific effects (while knowing that some form of failure is inevitable). This non-deterministic form of power recognizes the fallibility of decisions and decision-makers: that the world around us invites but also constrains the movements and adjustments we might try to engineer when we engage with and try to alter assemblages of social relations. In turn, I argue that a consideration of iterative power demands empirical research that examines how individuals within iterable decision-making structures *enact* power, not only by doing what might be expected of them but also via processes of translation whereby the social world around them is grappled with, interpreted, theorized, and re-made.

Crucially, however, when individuals enact power in such an iterative fashion – when they draw upon diverse resources to understand and then try to successfully intervene in the world – it is necessary to recognize how their actions occur in what we should imagine as a *geographical*

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1 Judith Butler, “Performative agency”, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, vol. 3, 2010, pp.147–161.

2 *Ibid.*, p.149.

manner; that is, enacting iterative power always entails participating in a process of *spatial* re-arrangement. Per Butler, then, political decision-making occurs via an iterative process; but following insights from geographers such as Doreen Massey,<sup>3</sup> that iterative process involves theorizing how the distribution and relative position of diverse materials might be adjusted; and requires drawing on ideas about how the patterns of numerous flows might be tweaked, such that new anticipated outcomes might arise. In short, if geographers are correct to posit that space is the product of social relations,<sup>4</sup> and if some of the most crucial social relations entail practices of power (via modalities such as seduction, manipulation, or domination),<sup>5</sup> it follows that power is always enacted in an iterative manner in ways that necessarily draw upon but also re-make *space*.

Of course, exactly how any individual decision-maker engages in this sort of iterative process will always vary. But yet, in the context of societies in which capitalist accumulation occurs, the contradictions accumulation processes must negotiate, and those which it inevitably create, undoubtedly *influence* political decision-making. In contrast to a strict Marxist interpretation of capitalism, what Butler's provocation calls for is a recognition that state power, action in the democratic sphere, or individual enactments of iterative power *only respond to* accumulation and not necessarily in ways that always 'fit' capitalist logics. Moreover, the need for this more open sense of the relationship between the political and the economic is amplified when, again, we think geographically about the processes at issue here. The central point to note is that capitalist accumulation occurs geographically; that spatial particularities matter; that unusual arrangements and flows meet up with one another and are drawn upon and altered wherever capitalist accumulation occurs.<sup>6</sup> The effect is that decision-makers must interpret the dynamics and possibilities of accumulation *and* the uneven geography with which it interacts when they iteratively calculate how arrangements and flows might be adjusted. Because of the open-ended

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3 Doreen Massey, *For space*, London, SAGE, 2005.

4 *Ibid.* Also Doreen Massey & John Allen, *Geographical worlds*, Milton Keynes, Open University, 1995.

5 John Allen, *Lost geographies of power*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2003.

6 On the spatiality of capitalism, see especially David Harvey, *The limits to capital*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1982.

nature of space, because the future is *not* pre-determined by the way processes unfold *today*, enacting power entails making decisions that might later on prove to have been mistakes. Paying attention to space – to geography, to the spatial configurations of materials and social relations – is crucial if we are to understand how iterative power is enacted, especially when such decision-making is forced to grapple with processes of (and the contradictions emerging from) capitalist accumulation.

### *South Africa in focus*

Few places in the world illuminate the importance to geography to the relationship between politics and capitalist accumulation as South Africa.<sup>7</sup> Accumulation in South Africa occurred via the creation and maintenance of a unique configuration of materials and flows, especially the migrant labour system which made profitability possible in the country's numerous gold mines. Under the force of economic compulsion from the 1880s onwards, male Africans were drawn to the Rand to work for extended periods of time, often close to a year at a time.<sup>8</sup> Whilst working on the mines, they were required to live in mine compounds while their families continued to reside in rural areas – areas that by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and thereafter via laws such as the 1913 Natives Land Act, were known as 'native reserves.'<sup>9</sup> This labour system, allied with racially discriminatory laws and workplace practices which reserved relatively skilled mining work for white workers only, made South Africa's labour-intensive mining industry highly profitable and thereby formed the economic basis for various other transformations in a country which eventually would become southern Africa's industrial powerhouse. The particularities of place – the meeting up of geology, urbanization, race, imperial ambition, and universalizing colonial abstractions about the possibilities of 'progress' and the future – combined with the more general process of accumulation. The story of

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7 Kevin R. Cox, *Political geography: Territory, state, and society*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2002.

8 Luli Callinicos, *Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985.

9 William Beinart & Peter Delius, "The Historical Context and Legacy of the Natives Land Act of 1913", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 40, 2014, pp.667-688.

South Africa is intimately bound up with the constant iterative negotiation of its peculiar configuration of socio-spatial relations.

How decision-makers responded to this geography – that is, how South Africa's geography was interpreted and formed the basis for calculations about how power could be enacted – remains under-researched in South African historiography. This shortcoming might reflect a broader tendency in the literature to downplay or sideline geographical considerations, almost as if spatial arrangements and flows are of tangential, rather than central, significance to decision-making processes. But a correction is required if we are to begin understanding how power is enacted in an iterative fashion. Space matters. Understanding *how* requires a form of investigation that reveals and uses empirical materials about decision-makers in South Africa's past to create new knowledge about enactments of power, the iterable structures within which relations between the political and the economic were interpreted and negotiated, and the ways in which capitalist accumulation and its geography shaped translations of, and imaginaries about, the prospective worlds that decision-makers might have liked to create.

This article tackles just such an intellectual challenge via an analysis of political action during the first years of the Union of South Africa, which was established in 1910. Fundamentally at issue during this period was the overall British imperial project, the management of which occupied numerous British civil servants and government officials who, in collaboration with those in the Colonial Office in London, were charged with the demanding responsibility of navigating a wide range of tensions. There were, for example, divisions between the British and a wounded Boer population; the contradictory interests shaping relations between the mining houses and mineworkers; and then the various debates and complications arising from the country's so-called 'native question.' If keeping the imperial project on track required the development of an "imperial

formula,”<sup>10</sup> it also meant that technicians on the ground had to make numerous calculations about, and interventions intended to alter or hold steady, the mixing of diverse materials, interests, and movements. As in *governance* practices more generally, the majority of these actions dealt with relatively mundane episodes where precedent and experience offered sufficient guidance about what should be done. Less common were serious flashpoints where potentially path-altering decisions were required. Either way, as theorists of state relationality and “state effects” in the contemporary period have argued,<sup>11</sup> the key point here is that British imperialism in early twentieth century South Africa had to be managed, handled, massaged. There may have been grand designs, universalizing abstractions, and even something approximating an imperial logic guiding how the British would act; but seeing like a state<sup>12</sup> requires individuals converting authority into action, while imagining, interpreting, and enacting iterative power on a daily basis (and on the ground).

As such, I argue the archival materials deposited by British officials from this period in twentieth century South Africa present opportunities to research and analyze how grounded everyday enactments interacted with the imperial project. Such an analysis can add to contributions made by those scholars who have shed extensive light on some of the most significant individuals in this period, perhaps most notably Alfred Milner, whose ideas and actions, in the aftermath of the Boer War especially, shaped South Africa’s development in profound ways.<sup>13</sup> Milner was an *alchemist* of Ashforth’s imperial formula; an individual who made a lasting impression on the place. His idea was for South Africa to become a new country in which the mines would retain access to migrant labour originating in the native reserves and settlers would retain access to large tracts of the best

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10 Adam Ashforth, “Lineaments of the political geography of state formation in twentieth-century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol. 10, 1997, pp. 101-126.

11 E.g. see Mike Raco, “Governmentality, subject-building, and the discourses and practices of devolution in the UK”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 28, 2003, pp.75-95; Joe Paimter, “Prosaic geographies of stateness”, *Political Geography*, vol. 25, 2006, pp.752-774.

12 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1998.

13 Godfrey Hugh Le May, *British Supremacy in South Africa, 1899-1907*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965. Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, “Lord Milner and the South African State”, *History Workshop*, vol. 8, 1979, pp.50-80. Saul Dubow, “Colonial Nationalism, the Milner Kindergarten and the Rise of ‘South Africanism’, 1902-10”, *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 43, 1997, pp.53-85.

agricultural land; a South Africa in which Europeans would secure racial domination of Africans whilst also achieving a level of economic growth that would make the country accessible to and valuable for British industrial capital.<sup>14</sup> Detailed research on the many other Britons who followed Milner, each of whom went on to make their own (and, admittedly, less groundbreaking) impressions on the British imperial project in twentieth century South Africa, has not added up to much.<sup>15</sup> Might analyses of the grounded everyday enactments of British officials shed some light on the imperial project in South Africa?

One matter that should be of significant concern for such research is how British actors negotiated an imperial project that was beginning to come apart at the seams. At issue here is that Milner's ambitions for the country were, certainly in hindsight, unrealistic. In the first place, the settlers he believed would come to South Africa were probably always going to be in a subordinate position with respect to the mines, whose demand for labour was so enormous and growing that even apartheid-era governments – with the extraordinary powers they acquired – struggled to sufficiently support the agricultural sector.<sup>16</sup> A South Africa conducive to *extensive* settlement by Europeans never took shape. Moreover, Milner's hopes that Boers would be content to strike a bargain with a mining industry intent on shaping the country in an image of its choosing failed to anticipate the eventual strength of Afrikaner nationalism, which found among the mine houses plenty of evidence to suggest that white privileges were on shaky ground. Finally, the flaws in Milner's vision were, quite soon thereafter, compounded by an emerging 'collectivist liberalism'<sup>17</sup> in Britain, adherents to which never viewed the imperial project in South Africa in the same light as Milner (or the

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14 Shula Marks & Stanley Trapido, "Lord Milner", *op cit.*

15 Before Milner, too, few officials have been the subject of sustained research. An exception is Theophilus Shepstone e.g. see Thomas V. McClendon, *White chief, Black lords: Shepstone and the colonial state in Natal, South Africa, 1845-1878*, Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2010.

16 Deborah Posel, *The Making of Apartheid, 1948-1961: Conflict and Compromise*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991; Dan O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1996.

17 See John W. Auld, "The Liberal Pro-Boers", *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 14, 1975, pp.78-101.



Conservative government that sent him to the country in the first place).<sup>18</sup> South Africa, like imperialism more generally, would never occupy the minds of Liberal party politicians in London quite like Milner might have expected of future governments.

Even so, although matters at home and in Europe more generally were certainly the core concerns for the Liberal governments elected in 1906 and 1910, the South African question still lingered. The Liberals dealt with it, in part, via the 1909 South Africa Act, which had emerged from negotiations with prominent South African politicians.<sup>19</sup> The Act was viewed by the Liberal government as a viable way forward for the country. It sought to unite South Africa's four provinces – Transvaal, Natal, Orange Free State, and the Cape Colony – under one government and locate them as a key Dominion within the British Empire.<sup>20</sup> Its legislative powers were to be overseen by London, with input on the ground from a Governor-General. Yet, upon the impending formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, and with growing concern about Germany's military intentions in Europe, Prime Minister Asquith opted only to send Herbert J. Gladstone (1854-1930) as the first Governor-General of the Union of South Africa, rather than Winston Churchill, one of the other, more capable, candidates for the position.

### *Herbert Gladstone's South Africa*

Gladstone had been a Member of Parliament since 1880, Chief Whip of the Liberal Party in opposition (1899-1905), and Home Secretary (1906-1910) in Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith Cabinets.<sup>21</sup> Unlike his father, W.E. Gladstone, without doubt the foremost British politician of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>22</sup> Herbert had enjoyed a mediocre political career. Yet as Home Secretary – “a tenure

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18 Jose Harris, “The Liberal Empire and British Social Policy: Citizens, Colonials, and Indigenous Peoples, circa 1880-1914”, *Histoire@Politique*, vol. 11, 2010/2 p.5.

19 Shula Marks & Stanley Trapido, “Lord Milner”, *op cit.*, pp.50-80.

20 Saul Dubow, “Colonial Nationalism, the Milner Kindergarten and the Rise of 'South Africanism', 1902-10”, *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 43, 1997, pp.53-85.

21 Charles Edward Mallet, *Herbert Gladstone: A Memoir*, London, Hutchinson & Co., 1932.

22 Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone*, London, Macmillan, 1995.

more subdued than glorious”<sup>23</sup> – he had developed a reputation for relatively competent administration, and had overseen the development of legislative reforms aimed at improving the working and living conditions of Britain’s working classes.<sup>24</sup> Although not counted as one of its many talented ministers,<sup>25</sup> he was a Cabinet member in two ambitious Liberal governments that introduced a series of “financial, labour, social welfare, and ‘economic development’ reforms unprecedented in British history.”<sup>26</sup>

In South Africa, Gladstone occupied a politically-sensitive position, with plenty of scope for failure. But he went to the country with the hope of contributing fruitfully to the development of effective governance mechanisms, guided by his experience as Home Secretary in London, which provided him with a sense for what needed to be done.<sup>27</sup> Unlike Milner, then, Gladstone was simply a technician of the imperial formula in South Africa. He had few powers to craft change in the country. His position with respect to, and his duties in service of, the Union government largely had been worked out by the time he arrived.

It is fair to surmise that Gladstone made only a slight impact on South African history. Perhaps for this reason, therefore, he is simply one among many British officials whose contributions to South Africa have been kept in the shadow of Milner. Yet, Gladstone undoubtedly had a privileged opportunity to see the country taking shape at such a crucial juncture. He had reason to write about numerous events and developments; and he deposited in his archive some lucid and original analyses of the country’s emerging tensions and dynamics. In the rest of the article, then, my aim is to address Gladstone’s absence in the literature but also to investigate his interaction with the

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23 Michael Bentley, “Gladstone’s Heir”, *The English Historical Review*, vol. 107, 1992, p.922.

24 Mallet, *Herbert Gladstone, op. cit.* Gladstone was most proud of the Workmen’s Regulation Act (1906) and the Coal Mines Regulation Act (1908).

25 Roy Jenkins, *Asquith*, London, Collins, 1978, p.175.

26 Harris, “The Liberal Empire and British Social Policy: Citizens, Colonials, and Indigenous Peoples, circa 1880-1914”, *Histoire@Politique*, vol. 11, 2010/2 p.5.

27 Mallet, *Herbert Gladstone, op. cit.*, p.245.

imperial project, the South Africa emerging from the Boer War, and his location as a decision-maker in an iterative enactment of power which forced him to negotiate South Africa's unique geography.

My approach in the rest of the article is to analyze his written responses to a critical incident which occurred toward the end of his stay in the country. Examinations of critical incidents is a widely-used technique in qualitative research methodologies because it focuses attention on the ways in which actors respond to, and interpret, social action in *acute* situations where contradictions and tensions come to the fore.<sup>28</sup> I apply this general methodology by arguing the strike of white railway and mine workers in January 1914 was just such a critical incident for Gladstone; an incident which forced him to write about and dwell upon the country's past, present, and future. I first use Gladstone's writings about these events to present a descriptive account of his response to the strike. I then explore subsequent comments he made about social relations in South Africa as a whole. Finally, in a discussion of the materials reviewed throughout the article, I offer a critical interpretation of the way Gladstone interacted with and enacted the imperial project in early twentieth century South Africa.

### **Gladstone and the January 1914 strike**

In January 1914, a strike by white railway workers – and subsequent actions by workers in other sectors, not least in the gold mines, which culminated in a general strike<sup>29</sup> – gave rise to a set of circumstances that would, yet again, place Gladstone in an awkward position. A mere six months before this, in July 1913 – and amidst a strike by mine workers that led to serious disturbances in and around the Rand – he had agreed to let the Union government use 3,000 British imperial troops to establish public order, retain control over critical infrastructure, and control the mine compounds

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28 See David Tripp, "Teachers' lives, critical incidents, and professional practice", *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, vol. 7, 1994, pp. 65-76.

29 William Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.92.

in which 200,000 African mine workers were housed.<sup>30</sup> In London, sections of the press and some MPs criticised this decision but Gladstone held steady and argued forcefully that his decision to support the use of imperial troops was correct.

Events in 1914 might also have led to the use of imperial troops. They did not, as it turned out. But when the Union government proclaimed Martial Law on January 14 – a day after the general strike was called – Gladstone had to decide whether to overrule the government. Writing to Loulou Harcourt,<sup>31</sup> Colonial Secretary in London, he noted that “the ultima ratio in the form of a Proclamation declaring a state of Martial Law had to be signed by me. I do not think that in the circumstances, I had any option. I certainly entertained no doubt.”<sup>32</sup> And as with the events in July, Gladstone was prepared to fight his corner: “If my action is attacked,” he wrote, “I am quite ready to defend it.”<sup>33</sup>

Unquestionably, circumstances on the Rand, and in the country as a whole, concerned him, even if the overall situation was “very different and far less explosive than it was in July.”<sup>34</sup> In part, what was different was the “tone of the men's leaders compared to what it was in July [insofar as they] are discouraging acts of disorder.”<sup>35</sup> There had been “dynamite outrages on the railway line”<sup>36</sup> and he emphasised in a later dispatch that a

...mail train which left Johannesburg on the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> January for Cape Town was within an ace of destruction some 4 miles from Johannesburg. Dynamite had been placed on the line and a section of the wheel of the leading engine, and of the

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30 See also Jonathan Hyslop, “The strange death of Liberal England and the Strange Birth of Illiberal South Africa: British Trade Unionists, Indian Labourers and Afrikaner Rebels, 1910-1914”, *Labour History Review*, vol. 79, 2014, pp.97-120.

31 On Harcourt, see Patrick Jackson, *Loulou: Selected Extracts from the Journals of Loulou Harcourt (1880-1895)*, Madison, Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006.

32 The National Archives of the UK (hereafter TNA), Gladstone to Loulou Harcourt, Jan 22 1914, CO551/54 p.405.

33 *Ibid.*, p.406

34 TNA, Gladstone to Harcourt, Jan 14 1914, CO551/53 p.192.

35 *Ibid.*

36 *Ibid.* p.193

rail, were blown away when the train was running at speed. Fortunately the train, though disabled for the night, kept the metals.<sup>37</sup>

But these were isolated actions, countered by the fact that “Patrols of strikers have been organised to preserve order.”<sup>38</sup>

Another “singular and instructive”<sup>39</sup> difference between the 1914 strike and the events in 1913 concerned the Union government’s level of preparedness. Looking back at July 1913 he had suggested to Harcourt that:

It was easy after the event to blame the Government for a lack of foresight. That the organisation of the Government Department was immature, Ministers themselves for the most part were inexperienced in administration and they were hampered by party dissensions. Over and above all these considerations which may be urged in their defence, South Africa had given little occasion for the study of complicated problems arising out of the relations between employers and employed in large industries.<sup>40</sup>

In short, Gladstone concluded that the July 1913 strike had exposed a state apparatus that was ill-prepared to deal with such a significant challenge to the government’s authority. The government was young; it lacked sufficient understanding of how it might effectively intervene in society. One of Gladstone’s objectives was to encourage this young government to bolster its powers and expand its capacity to act.

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37 TNA, Gladstone to Harcourt, Jan 22 1914, CO551/54 p.176.

38 TNA, Gladstone to Harcourt, Jan 14 1914, *op. cit.*, p.192.

39 *Ibid.*, p.191.

40 *Ibid.*, p.187. Such conclusions were easy to reach given that, as Hyslop *op cit.* p.98 notes, “the South African state was visibly fragile”.

Thus, Gladstone was happy that the state's apparatus had improved by January 1914. The government was now able to rely on Defence Forces, enacted by the Defence Act No. 13 of 1912, and called into the affected areas from the countryside. As such, by "Saturday the 10<sup>th</sup> [January] the Defence Forces had assembled in sufficient numbers to deal with any disturbances which might arise."<sup>41</sup> The arrival of these forces from the rural areas had been the "most picturesque feature in the situation, and probably also a decisive factor in the prevention of serious disorder."<sup>42</sup> The government's mobilization of the Defence Forces had "been admirably effected. Boer commandos seem available in all directions. Trains are running to an increasing extent. Armed men hold all important Railway centres and patrol the lines. Some 15,000 are in, or within easy reach of, Johannesburg and the Reef."<sup>43</sup>

As such, when Martial Law was proclaimed, Gladstone concluded that the "Government in fact have the situation in hand. At every stage they have been in advance of the strikers."<sup>44</sup> For example, "When the men's pickets turned out [...] they found that the [train] stations and all important centres or points of possible mischief were already occupied by armed men."<sup>45</sup> He therefore praised the Union government. Far from actions reflective of a weak state, he told Harcourt: "I doubt whether any precedent can be found for protective measures so complete, prompt and effectual. Although the area of trouble is far greater than it was in July, the situation is not likely to involve the perils which then confronted us. The situation to-day shows the Government in overwhelming strength."<sup>46</sup>

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41 *Ibid.* p.192. See also Hyslop, "The strange death", *op cit.* p.116. Hyslop notes that: "Particularly heavy use was made of rural Boers in repressing the Rand trade unionists. From the outside, the military aspects of the January 1914 operation had appeared to go well for the government."

42 TNA, Gladstone to Harcourt, Jan 15 1914, CO551/53 p.228.

43 TNA, Gladstone to Harcourt, Jan 14 1914, *op. cit.*, p.191.

44 *Ibid.* p.192.

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Ibid.* p.193. Also Hyslop, "The strange death", *op. cit.*, pp.116-119. For Hyslop, the government had controlled the situation but the January strike drew attention to tensions between rural Boers and the government, which flared up in August 1914 when war with Germany began.

All of the afore-mentioned developments meant that, this time, the government was unlikely to require any support from imperial troops, unless “it may be desirable to use them for the protection of the Protectorate and Portuguese natives either in the compounds or for the purpose of repatriation [to their home regions or countries] should that course have unfortunately to be adopted.”<sup>47</sup> But repatriation – a dramatic and complicated move – would only become necessary “should circumstances ultimately necessitate the complete closing down of the mines for a lengthy period. It is however hoped that no such emergency will occur.”<sup>48</sup>

In the meantime, he was impressed that “Elaborate arrangements have been made for the protection of the natives on the mines and for the prevention of unrest among them. A large store of provisions, sufficient it is said to ration them for one month, is kept in reserve, and the compounds are adequately guarded.”<sup>49</sup> Consequently, Gladstone identified among the general public “a complete absence of panic” and a sense of “full confidence in the effectiveness of the precautionary measures taken by the Government.”<sup>50</sup> “Strong action was taken,” he wrote to Harcourt on Jan 22, “and with such promptitude that at every point the strikers found themselves forestalled and out manoeuvred...”<sup>51</sup>

### **Class, race, and South Africa’s prospects**

The January 1914 strike was undoubtedly a critical incident during Gladstone’s stay in South Africa. Once the strike collapsed, in part under the severe weight of Martial Law, Gladstone’s responsibilities required him to develop and send to London some justification for his actions. In doing so, of course, he was compelled to discuss what he believed to be the gravity of the situation: the potential for ‘mischief’ on the part of striking workers, the risk that ‘natives’ would become

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47 *Ibid.* p.194.

48 TNA, Gladstone to Harcourt, Jan 15 1914, *op. cit.*, p.234.

49 *Ibid.*, p.233.

50 *Ibid.*

51 TNA, Gladstone to Harcourt, Jan 22 1914, *op. cit.*, p.177

restless – “Without food the natives would be uncontrollable,” he told Harcourt.<sup>52</sup> But he also went further than the task of reporting on the immediate situation by presenting a brief yet insightful analysis of the deeper tensions shaping events in July 1913 and January 1914. My focus in this part of the article is on what Gladstone had to say.

In an earlier dispatch to Harcourt, Gladstone referred back to the events in July 1913 and noted that “serious trouble was only a question of time” given what he said was the...

...entire absence of the right relations between Mineowners and Miners, which should exist in an organised industry; the growing bitterness of a large section of the men; the want of controlling and guiding influence; the fierce resentment at the callousness shown in earlier days by the mining Houses who made no attempt to deal with the ravages of phthisis; the inadequacy of the remedies when at least the question was forced on Parliament...<sup>53</sup>

At issue in January 1914, he suggested, were similar problems. Drawing a contrast with Britain, where he had helped introduce legislation to alter the general relations of production during his tenure as Home Secretary, Gladstone emphasized in a dispatch at the end of January the importance of developing a certain structure of working relations between employers and employees:

In all great employments in the United Kingdom a large percentage of men is to be found who have worked all their lives, and of many who have worked for long stretches of years, for their employer. Good conditions of work keep the men

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.167.

<sup>53</sup> TNA, Gladstone to Harcourt, Jan 14 1914, *op. cit.*, p.187.



contented and loyal, and though they may take part in strikes, this, as a rule, does not mean a personal rupture with owners and managers.<sup>54</sup>

In Britain, then, Gladstone believed stability and permanency had produced ‘contented and loyal’ men. The situation in South Africa was, from his perspective, nowhere near as developed. “There are good employers on the Reef,” he told Harcourt, “and there are good men who work continually with them.” But, he continued, “Managers vary, and Mining Groups vary. Personal affinities between employers and employed are almost non-existent.”<sup>55</sup> At issue in South Africa were deep-seated practices in the workplace:

Management, in so far as it relates to human beings as apart from working capacities has been left to the main to chance. The practice of 24 hours' notice on either side has become fundamental. But it is almost fatal to mutual and loyal understandings. The men, knowing they can get as good or a better job elsewhere, continually move from one mine to another. Similarly Managers are not restrained from summary dismissals by the knowledge that a man, perhaps with a family, will be out of a job. Miners, therefore, are independent units. This may have its advantages, but the mutual independence of each other, characteristic of mining employers and employed on the Reef, prevents the growth of mutual respect and consideration essential to sound and permanent industrial conditions.<sup>56</sup>

As such, one key issue emerging from the “dynamics of the general social and industrial position in South Africa”<sup>57</sup> was a lack of stability; a degree of impermanency, flux. Commenting on the miners, for example, he stressed that “A large proportion of them are unmarried; they shift about from one

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54 TNA, Gladstone to Harcourt, Jan 31 1914, CO551/55 p.190.

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Ibid.* p.191. “Autocratic mineowners”, Hyslop notes (*op cit.* p.99), had “blocked attempts to broaden the base of the industrial economy” and even experimented by importing Chinese workers a decade earlier.

57 *Ibid.* p.191.

mine to another; the number who intend to settle in the country is far less than in the case of the railway men who look forward to pensions. As a class, miners are more restless and less provident.”<sup>58</sup>

On its own, perhaps, such levels of impermanency might not have mattered. But Gladstone had encountered in South Africa not just the industrial situation but also how it connected with the country’s broader material prospects. In many respects the interests of itinerant miners clashed with those on whom, for Gladstone, the country’s “ultimate, and to a large extent the present, prosperity”<sup>59</sup> depended: the country’s white farmers. What seemed to frustrate him so much about how white rail and mine workers had acted was precisely that the concerns of the country’s farmers had been swept to the one side:

Syndicalist leaders appeared both in July and January to ignore the views of all classes excepting the crowds who assembled to listen to their oratory [...] The 97,000 farmers, who are the industrial backbone of South Africa, were never mentioned. Scattered as they were through a great area, it appears to have been thought that they could be ignored by the Trades Hall. They are not capitalists. As a class they do not look with favour on mine owners. Certainly they were not hostile to the reasonable demands of white workmen. These men are proud of their country and hate disorder. They look to the Government to attend to their interests and give them protection. They constitute the mass of the population. *Settled on the land, their interests are wholly and permanently South African.* The attempt of a small number of individuals, with *no abiding stake in the country*, to subvert the government of the

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p.189.

<sup>59</sup> TNA, Gladstone to Harcourt, Jan 22 1914, *op. cit.*, p.174.

country, was regarded by the farmers generally with unqualified disapproval and hostility.<sup>60</sup>

In looking to farmers, therefore, Gladstone could see in them South Africa's potential nation-builders. Whereas miners had no "abiding stake" in the country, Gladstone argued that the Union government's hopes of creating a strong Dominion within the empire hinged on settlers, those with interests that were "wholly and permanently" South African. Farmers and settlers, not miners, would be needed to establish the appropriate South African society.

Crucially, Gladstone was not shy in connecting race, which was the obvious complicating factor in South Africa's industrial relations, to his critique of the miners.<sup>61</sup> He suggested that the principal reason that "conditions of employment and wages in South Africa differ materially from those which prevail in the United Kingdom"<sup>62</sup> was that white mine workers were intent on maintaining racial privileges over Africans in the workplace. White workers leaned heavily on a legal architecture that "forbids a native to do skilled work – not because he cannot do it so well, but to keep the monopoly of skilled work in European hands at a rate of pay to be fixed by themselves."<sup>63</sup> He was not impressed: "The white workmen in South Africa," he wrote to Harcourt, "are in fact a middle privileged class"<sup>64</sup> and among "the most highly paid miners in the world."<sup>65</sup> Whereas white mine workers earned at least £20 and up to £40 a month, African mine workers earned a mere £3 or £4. But "most of the hard and exacting work of the country is done by the natives."<sup>66</sup>

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60 TNA, Gladstone to Harcourt, Jan 31 1914, *op. cit.*, p.195; my emphases.

61 This is not so suggest that he entirely dismissed the miners' legitimate grievances. He sympathised with their plight, especially "the terrible toll of life exacted by phthisis [which] narrows and embitters their outlook." The "fierce, uncompromising spirit among the men who are liable to contract phthisis," he noted, "can be readily understood." their, "high wages are of no account when once the disease gets its hold."

62 TNA, Gladstone to Harcourt, Jan 31 1914, *op. cit.*, p.187.

63 *Ibid.*

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*, p.190.

66 *Ibid.*, p.187.

Drawing contrasts with Britain again, he therefore made the following assessment of a key part of the political scene in South Africa:

If the White Labour party claims to hold the position of the labour party at home and to be equally entitled to public sympathy, the reply is that the labour party at home includes the great mass of unskilled workmen drawing wages which too often are wretchedly low. The labour party here excludes the unskilled men, not because of the inefficiency of his work, but because his skin is black, he is outside the ring, he is a man but not a comrade.<sup>67</sup>

Consequently, he suggested that, “So long as the white workmen maintain this position it is obvious that their attacks on their employers and the 'capitalist classes' in large measure must recoil upon themselves. The right they claim to sell their labour at the best price they can get, they deny to the native.”<sup>68</sup> The African was, he said, “striving in his own way to improve himself” but the structure of industrial relations ultimately meant that, “he is not allowed to sell his labour and his skill except at a small figure far below its economic value so that the high wage of the white man whether or not his skill and energy justify the payment may be kept up.”<sup>69</sup>

Gladstone’s views regarding the white worker were, on the one level, merely a reflection of his deep-seated liberalism: white workers were presenting unnecessary obstacles in the way of the type of economic development which he conceptualized as progress. But on another level it is possible to discern a relatively astute understanding of what, from his liberal point of view, were the risks facing the country. The social and industrial dynamics in South Africa were based on a peculiar

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.188.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

engineering of class exploitation and racial domination.<sup>70</sup> Exploitation of Africans did not matter to Gladstone; in fact, his viewpoint was that exploitation was for their own good, something which helped the African in his effort to improve himself. But he was undoubtedly disturbed by certain evident forms of racial domination. Attitudes toward Africans among some Europeans frustrated him. Moreover, if there was a “race question [which] permeated the whole of South Africa irrespective of boundaries,”<sup>71</sup> it was complicated by the country’s poor whites.<sup>72</sup> He had told Harcourt in a personal and confidential letter in July 1911 that the poor whites were “either wastrels or unskilled men fit only for unskilled manual work.” “It is,” he noted, “too often disgusting to see the skilled white in charge of a gang of natives. All day he loafes just directing and compelling. Hands in pocket, pipe in mouth, not infrequently swollen with drink. If this goes on white labour will go under.”<sup>73</sup> He was critical that poor whites would not work with Africans and had a sense for what the economic consequences would be: “If they would [work with Africans], how can a white man’s living wage be provided in face of the equally good or better work of the cheaper native? This is the crux.”<sup>74</sup>

Much like his critique of the colour bar on the mines, therefore, Gladstone found little to admire in a South African society that sought to “keep back the natives under the delusion that it will give work to the poor whites...”<sup>75</sup> Rather than providing succour to poor whites via discrimination against Africans, many of whom he said were “rapidly acquiring greater skill and more settled habits of industry,”<sup>76</sup> Gladstone expressed his hope that the country would see the development of a “wiser white policy on the native question.”<sup>77</sup> South Africa, Gladstone argued, “requires all the labour she

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70 Ashforth, “Lineaments of the political geography” *op. cit.*; Marks & Stanley Trapido, “Lord Milner”, *op. cit.*; Hyslop, “The strange death”, *op. cit.*

71 British Library (hereafter, BL), Gladstone’s typewritten draft of unpublished autobiography, Additional Manuscripts (hereafter AM) 46118 p.202

72 On the wider politics of poor whiteism, see Edward-John Bottomley, “Transnational governmentality and the ‘poor white’ in early twentieth century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 54, 2016, pp.76-86.

73 BL, Gladstone to Harcourt, July 14 1911, AM 45997 p.187.

74 *Ibid.*

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Ibid.*, p.188.

can get and the right policy is to develop native capacities. The white man must compete or he will have to go. And in many parts of S.A. he can compete. Industrial expansion will follow the fuller development of native capacities and that will increase opportunities for the white man.”<sup>78</sup>

## **Discussion**

The preceding sections have described Gladstone’s interactions and actions with regards to the 1914 strike. Unlike other British officials who spent time in South Africa, especially men such as Milner, it is fair to conclude that Gladstone played a mere bit part in the background of the unfolding drama in South Africa. But whilst he was on stage during his tenure as Governor-General, particularly against the backdrop of the critical incident on which I have focused, Gladstone presented a range of liberal ideas about how the country could improve its future prospects. What might we make of his comments? Allow me to consider two issues.

The first concerns iterative power, which comes to light by analyzing Gladstone’s liberal proposals. As I have described, Gladstone expressed concern about what was going wrong in South Africa and made proposals about how the country could develop in a more stable manner. He wanted liberal order in the mines: more stable relations between the mine owners and their (white) workers; a better mutual understanding of their shared interests. And he then called on whites to adopt a more progressive attitude toward Africans; that is, for a more liberal society to emerge, in which poor whites would not take precedence over an increasingly capable African populace. Gladstone was correct to see *connections* between these two issues: the relations of production in the mines had been, and would continue to be, instrumental in South Africa; and at no stage was it ever possible to understand mining (or social life in general) without grasping the significance of the country’s unique structures of race relations. Capitalism, on the one hand, and liberal notions of progress on the other: both were bound up with the politics of class and race in South Africa. However, it should

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.187-188.

be clear that Gladstone's liberalism was incapable of coming to terms with the depth and intensity of the contradictions defining how South Africa was taking shape. He saw connections between class and race and believed in the virtues of liberal order as a mode of appropriately transforming society; but he under-estimated the extent to which accumulation in South Africa would require the *persistence* of illiberal practices.

With regards to the mines, for example, his sense that mining would be better served by establishing more stable relations with miners emanated from the British experience, a place where coal mining had developed in tight-knit, deeply patriarchal communities, which was necessary to reproduce the mining household. As Doreen Massey has noted: "A miner's work resulted in enormous domestic burdens for his wife and family. Underground work was filthy [...] Working clothes had to be boiled in coppers over the fire which had to heat all the hot water for washing clothes, people and floors."<sup>79</sup> But mining in South Africa was an altogether different entity. For one thing, the country's "reserves of gold were massive but the gold content of the so-called reefs was meagre and the reefs lay at a considerable depth,"<sup>80</sup> a problem the mining industry negotiated by instituting the illiberal system of migrant labour. For another, the mining industry in South Africa relied intensively on skilled but itinerant white managers and engineers, many of whom were only looking to earn high wages while working in the country for a short period of time.<sup>81</sup> Gladstone said nothing critical about the system of migrant labour, but he certainly expressed hope that a more permanent situation could emerge with respect to white workers. In contrast to the flux he found in the mining industry, he wanted more stable conditions. But the contradictions of accumulation ruled out this possibility: itinerant skilled white miners were already expensive, as indeed Gladstone noted, which meant offering them more secure conditions would only increase costs and threaten profitability in the industry. Moreover, by this stage the industry was already interested in training Africans to do more

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79 Doreen Massey, *Space, place and gender*, Cambridge, Polity, 1994 p.193.

80 Kevin R. Cox, "Geographies, critical and Marxist, and lessons from South Africa", *Human Geography*, vol. 9, 2016, pp.10-26.

81 Stephen Tuffnell, "Engineering inter-imperialism: American miners and the transformation of global mining, 1871-1910", *Journal of Global History*, vol. 10, 2015, pp.53-76. Hyslop, "The strange death", *op. cit.*

skilled tasks.<sup>82</sup> Were the mine owners able to do so, they would have Africanized the entire workforce. White workers knew this, hence efforts to institute job reservation and efforts on the part of the mines to prevent it: a debate which came to a head in the Rand Revolt in 1922 and went on to become a central feature in the structure of apartheid.<sup>83</sup> Capital was far more colour-blind than white workers could stomach. In summary, the type of liberalism Gladstone promoted might have had some purchase in British mines, but not in South Africa, where the pressure of capitalism's contradictions compelled the mining industry to embrace a deeply illiberal spatial arrangement of forces, one that encouraged a greater blossoming of African talents but only because it suited the industry's need to secure profits. There is nothing to suggest from Gladstone's archive that he understood these dynamics.

If Gladstone's liberal views on the mines under-estimated the extent to which accumulation in South Africa would require the creation of illiberal practices, his views on South Africa's ideal future demography also miscalculated what lay in front of him. Like Milner, he placed his hopes in the emergence of a country in which more whites were settled on the land. His faith was in the settled white with an 'abiding' stake in the country; with a new citizenry emerging under the Union government – a white and 'wholly and permanently South African' citizenry. For Gladstone, then, the "spatial fix"<sup>84</sup> to South Africa's tensions – tensions that had boiled over in July 1913 and again in January 1914 – was to attract more settlers, precisely because a population with such a stake in the country's future would engender the right conditions for liberal order: it was, after all, rural whites who had rallied to the government's call in January 1914, and he saw in that move evidence of a new national consciousness emerging. For Gladstone, a liberal society could develop from the social, political, and cultural foundations that white settlers constructed to protect their abiding stake in the country. Here again, however, Gladstone seems to have misunderstood what was taking shape in South Africa. On the one hand, there was the power of the country's mining industry and

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82 Callinicos, *Gold and Workers*, *op cit*.

83 Posel, *The making of apartheid*, *op cit*.

84 Harvey, *The Limits to capital*, *op. cit*.



its immense demand for labour to consider, a factor white farmers would have to contest over the coming decades: in effect, the geographical structure of the South African economy set a ceiling on ambitions for it becoming a settler-based society.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, even if South Africa did have more settlers, such a society presupposed illiberal practices, such as pass laws to retain access to African labour; or discriminatory laws such as the Natives Land Act of 1913 to prop up the migrant labour system and set aside land for exclusive white ownership. His call for more white settlers (for the inevitability of entrenched and expanded European control over the land) required that South Africa's illiberal practices were simply going to become more extensive, not scaled back. Gladstone's ideal mix of more settlers yielding a more stable spatial arrangement was never a recipe for liberalism.

Yet, Gladstone's hopes were not simply that settlers would arrive and encourage the stability he imagined was needed for liberal order to emerge. Rather, he was also adamant that whites needed to get over their 'delusion' about relations with Africans. He wanted a 'wiser white policy,' a liberalising policy: not only a new collective politics of the workplace to discourage impermanency and flux but also a dismantled colour bar and an end to discriminatory policies that held back workers based on the colour of their skin. The imperial project, as he imagined it, needed liberal reforms. Thus, in a farewell speech in Cape Town in 1914, in which he discussed the "great South African difficulty of colour,"<sup>86</sup> he commented that this "small white population to a great extent scattered in small communities over a great area" would need to develop a "moral force strong enough to crush the forces of ignorance and prejudice."<sup>87</sup> And he cautioned South Africa's elites about the need to find a more liberal arrangement:

I can only express my conviction that if public opinion is apathetic, and the colour question is left to take its political chances, the moral authority of the white man will

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85 O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, *op cit*.

86 BL, Gladstone speech in Cape Town, July 10 1914, AM 46113, p.307.

87 *Ibid.*, p.308.

continue to decrease, coloured men will lose such confidence as they may have, the natives will increasingly take what is worst from the white men, and *in the end you will have nothing to build upon, except force.*<sup>88</sup>

In Cape Town, then, Gladstone wrapped up his duties as Governor-General. He had enacted the imperial project: playing out his relatively minor role in the South Africa story and in Britain's role therein. But drawing on his understanding of the tensions expressed in the 1914 strike, Gladstone also probed the limits of that project. He saw the need for change, for liberal reforms, and even for beginning to concede ground to the country's subordinated peoples. Gladstone was questioning the basis of British and white rule in South Africa. His experience of the strikes had given him reason to look out on the country, to imagine how it might emerge in the future, and propose re-arrangements of socio-spatial relations, materials, and flows. He imagined how the imperial project might unfold differently via these new adjustments. As I have noted, Gladstone's ideas were never likely to produce the liberal society he appeared to believe in. Perhaps he knew that. Perhaps, indeed, and just as Butler provokes us to expect, Gladstone practised a form of iterative power: an ability and propensity to act that emerges from a performative back-and-forth that engages empirical realities on-the-ground (as influenced by the dynamics of accumulation). But in Gladstone's case, his iterative power also reflected an ongoing engagement with imperial rationality and his experience of translating Britain's interests in South Africa through the prism of his liberal ideas and precepts. His ideas about liberal reforms expressed this iterative power and yielded flawed proposals for re-arranging the country's unique geography. Flawed or not, however, as a decision-maker within a broader iterable structure, Gladstone's iterative power had been on plain display during his last few months in the country.

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88 *Ibid.*, p.307; my emphasis. Of course, force was *already* the basis for maintaining racial domination in South Africa. See Ivan Evans, "Racial Violence and the Origins of Segregation in South Africa", in C. Elkins and S. Pedersen (eds), *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century*, London, Routledge, 2005, pp.183-202; Lucy Valerie Graham, *State of Peril: Race and Rape in South African Literature*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012; John Higginson, "Hell in small places: Agrarian elites and collective violence in the western Transvaal, 1900-1907", *Journal of Social History*, vol. 35, 2001, pp. 95-124.

This leads me to consider the second issue for discussion. Gladstone's speech in Cape Town indicated his optimism about South Africa's future. He was, he said, "full of hope"<sup>89</sup> for the country. Gladstone retained such optimism without dwelling at all on the need for a liberal South Africa to create racial equality, a non-racial franchise, and therefore majority rule. His hopes for stability were misplaced so long as he refused to recognize the illiberal practices embedded in the flawed colonial-imperial venture in South Africa: a venture which hinged on a form of capitalist accumulation and a closely-associated state-building process that were illiberal to their cores; and would only manage to survive by developing violent disciplinary technologies, for example via more sophisticated pass laws, forms of urban governance defined more intensely by segregation, and numerous laws designed to suppress opposition.<sup>90</sup> Precisely because their 'abiding stake' in the country was so dependent upon (racialized structures of) exploitation of African labour, Europeans were forced to construct violent forms of governance. In the end, therefore, the *ultimate* flaw with Gladstone's liberalism was his refusal to begin understanding South Africa's subordinated peoples. Africans, for example, certainly had an 'abiding' – but because they were black, also a discounted and ultimately, for Gladstone, a dismissed – stake in the country. Thus, although Gladstone might have probed some of the limits of imperialism during his tenure as Governor-General, at the core of his interaction with South Africa was an inability to avoid committing the classic colonial error in Africa: under-estimating and ultimately misunderstanding the contribution Africans could have made (and were destined to make) to the country's social, economic, and political life. The Zulus, for example, were *inter alia* "very humorous," "most interesting," and even "magnificent fellows."<sup>91</sup> Tellingly, for Gladstone, Africans were "[i]n a sense children..."<sup>92</sup> As such, he could not see much need for Africans to imagine brighter futures beyond dependence upon Europeans.

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89 BL, Gladstone speech in Cape Town, *op. cit.*, p.308.

90 Posel, *The Making of Apartheid*, *op cit.*; O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, *op cit.* Laura Platzky and Cherryl Walker, *The Surplus People: Forced Removals in South Africa*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985.

91 BL, Gladstone's typewritten draft of unpublished autobiography, *op. cit.*, p.318.

92 *Ibid.*, p.317.

Gladstone's notion of the child-like African – uncivilised, undeveloped, and useless without tutoring from Europeans – was typical of the British colonial mindset.<sup>93</sup>

Yet during his time in the country there was an emerging South African civil society, coalescing in particular around the South African Native National Congress, which presented counter-narratives to the dominant colonial-imperial imaginary by emphasizing the need for (and indeed the possibility of) equality despite difference.<sup>94</sup> Certainly, one of the better-known activists was Sol Plaatje, whose criticisms – for example that “the South African native found himself, not actually a slave, but a pariah in the land of his birth”<sup>95</sup> – challenged the basis of British and white power in the country.<sup>96</sup> Even if Gladstone might have been inclined to dismiss such a critique, there were also Europeans who were refusing to view Africans as inferior. During the South African Natives Congress in Kimberley 1914, for example, one speaker was the Rev Leyton Richards, a British Congregational minister who later became a key figure in the British pacifist movement.<sup>97</sup> Calling for the establishment of a “nobler social order” in South Africa, one in which “every race should contribute in its fullest worth to the social whole, and in which there should be no barrier of colour, race, or creed athwart the paths of those who would climb to better things”, Richards was quoted as saying that he “was glad of the opportunity to speak to the Congress, not as a member of a superior race (*for he did not admit that difference implied superiority*), but as one man to other men...”<sup>98</sup> Such a view on race – of equality despite difference; that difference did not entail hierarchy – became part of the bedrock of the international human rights movement, which shaped the twentieth century in profound ways.<sup>99</sup> In South Africa, of course, it blended with radical pan-Africanism and Communism to challenge the basis of apartheid rule.<sup>100</sup> But even in Herbert Gladstone's South

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93 Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, James Currey, London, 1996.

94 Sol T Plaatje, *Native life in South Africa*, Johannesburg, Ravan, 1995.

95 *Ibid.* p.21.

96 Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial, 1890-1920*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

97 *The Times*, The Rev. Leyton Richards, Aug 24 1948.

98 *The Diamond Fields Advertiser*, S.A. Native Congress, March 3 1914; my emphasis.

99 Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Human rights in the twentieth century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

100 Beinart, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, *op. cit.*

Africa, even in 1914, there were challenges to the sort of condescending view of Africans he expressed. Gladstone, it appears, refused to hear, chose to ignore, or simply dismissed them. Perhaps if he had connected with the emerging civil society in South Africa – and managed to develop something beyond the typical colonial attitude towards Africans – his optimism for the country would have been more justified. Instead, therefore, Gladstone left South Africa in 1914 without ever coming to terms with the ultimate significance of the colonial-imperial venture he enacted and in which he had played a relatively minor but nevertheless privileged role.

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